

Beaver/Swift/Skyles Timber Sale Proposal Update

August 21, 2008
Issue 2

Time for an Update

Since the Initial Proposal newsletter was sent out in July 2007, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has met with various groups and people, reviewed comments, reevaluated the project, found additional dying trees, and analyzed and refined the project. This newsletter is an update on the progression of this timber sale proposal and will familiarize you with the project. The submitted issues and concerns are briefly addressed. This newsletter should give you a general idea of how the project has been designed thus far.

Timber Sale Project

Currently, the proposal would harvest 5 million board feet (MMbf) across 980 acres. Several silvicultural prescriptions (harvest methods) would be used that target insect and disease problems. These prescription would also consider aesthetics and fuels reduction. Pages 2 and 3 present maps of the harvest areas, including the road systems that would be used for these timber sale activities.

An assortment of tree species and age classes would be retained to

assist in reducing insect infestations and disease infections, as well as alleviating fire conditions. Our prescriptions, a combination of regeneration and intermediate harvests, would help create this mixture. More detailed descriptions of the harvest prescriptions will be presented in the environmental assessment. If you would like more information before that time, please contact Mike McMahon (406-881-2670) at the Stillwater Unit office.

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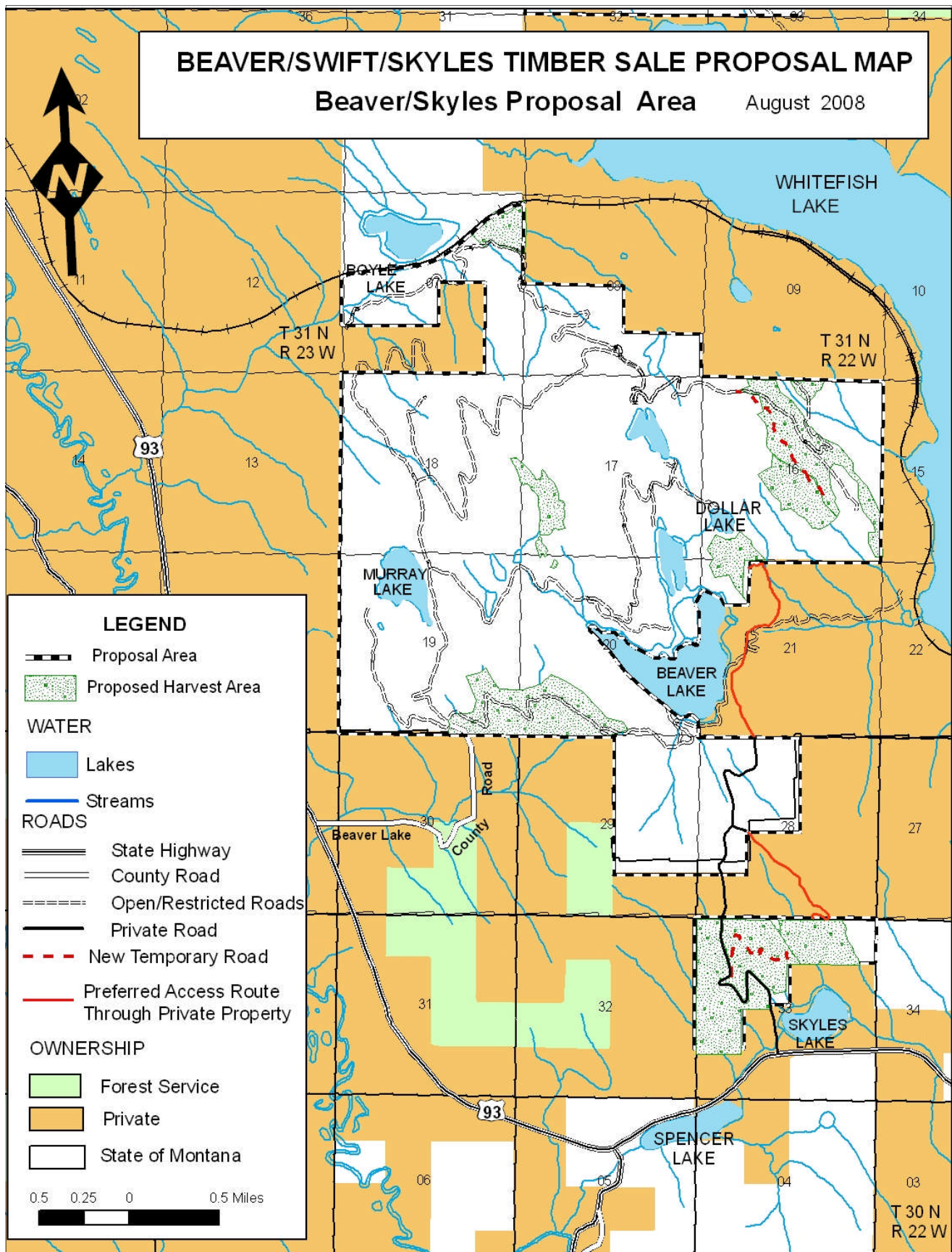
**Harvesting timber
provides revenue for
State trusts while
maintaining a healthy,
productive forest .**

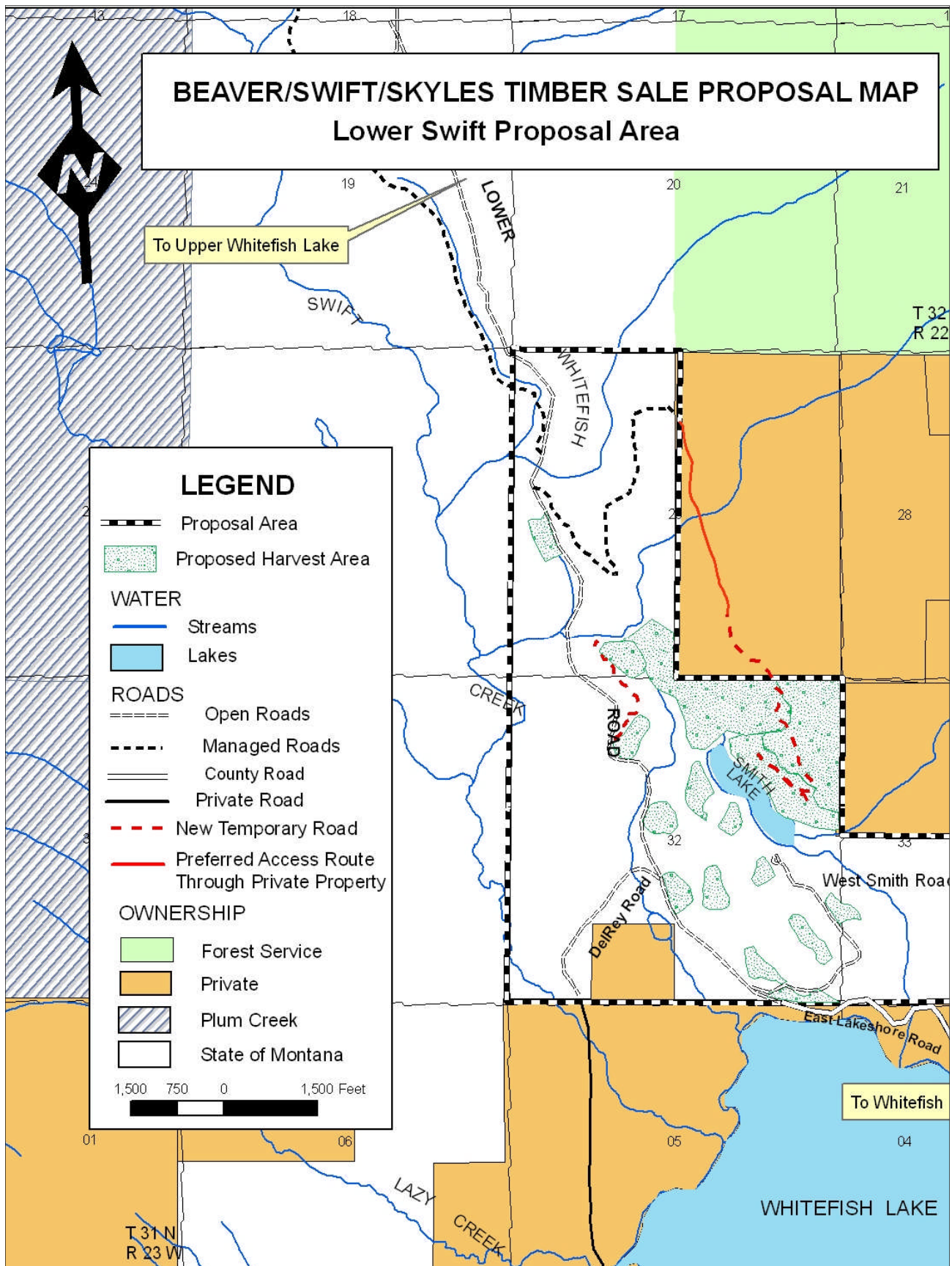
Special points of interest:

- ♦ The proposal would harvest 5 million board feet across 980 acres.
- ♦ This project will reduce forest fuels and the potential risk of wildfires.
- ♦ Harvest area maps, pages 2 and 3; Trail Runs Through It potential trail across State land, page 9.

Vicinity Map







Project Development

After the first newsletter and subsequent field tours, issues and concerns were brought to our attention regarding:

- Aesthetic
- Insects and diseases
- Water-quality
- Forest fuels and fuel management
- Murray Lake
- Smith Lake recreation and road relocation
- The *Trail Runs Through It* project

The foresters at Stillwater Unit have worked closely with a forester contracted by a group that is interested in this proposed sale. These same people are also very interested in our general management in accordance with the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan. Together we have worked to address the aforementioned issues and have attempted to incorporate

the appropriate mitigation measures in this proposal.

DNRC is going to analyze one action alternative with incorporated mitigations as well as the effects of taking no action. This will form the basis for an Environmental Assessment, which will enable the managers of Stillwater Unit and Kalispell Unit to make an informed decision on whether to implement the timber sale as proposed, choose not to implement the project, or require additional analysis.

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Federal lands were granted to the State when Montana was admitted into the Union. The Enabling Act of 1889 granted Sections 16 and 36 of each township to the State of Montana; or, as in the case of Stillwater State Forest, a block of land in lieu of sections in other areas.

Montana's Constitution requires that these lands, called State trust lands, be managed to provide revenue to support specific beneficiary institutions, such as public schools, State colleges and universities, and other specific State institutions. The Land Board and the Department are legally required to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate long-term return for these beneficiary institutions (*Section 77-1-202, Montana Codes Annotated [MCA]*).



Douglas-fir beetle frass (debris or excrement left by insects).



Rutting the shoreline and littering at Murray Lake are problems that need correcting.

Aesthetics

Aesthetic issues are not easy to manage. Beauty for one person is not necessarily beauty for another. With this in mind, DNRC is considering numerous mitigation measures to address aesthetic and viewshed issues, both up close and at a distance. Some mitigation measures contemplated include:

- maintaining additional trees and vegetation to provide screening along the open

roads and a proposed road that would face Whitefish Lake in Section 16 of the Beaver Lake area;

- ensuring that landings, roadside areas, and areas along proposed trails are cleaned up; and
- marking trees to leave a high amount of variability within the harvest areas (eg. leave groups of trees, create openings for new trees to grow, and leave extra trees on the edges of units to

feather the effects of harvesting).

DNRC has produced a 'fly-by' tour via the internet on Google Earth. The tour takes in an overview of the Beaver Lake area, followed by a 'movie' looking into the project area from several viewpoints such as Whitefish Lake and Big Mountain. The images used in this tour have been used to show foresters where additional trees could be left to alleviate some of the concerns that people have often associated with timber harvesting.

Foresters also put together a slide show that emphasizes the aspects of forest management for this project. Unit foresters are available to show you the Google Earth tour and the slideshow. Please call Mike McMahon at 406-881-2371 to set a time when this information can be presented.



The harvest area can be seen from the east side of Whitefish Lake.



A seedtree harvest area after 15 years.

Insect and Disease Issues

Insects infestations and disease infections will continue to be an issue in this area. The larch dwarf mistletoe, Douglas-fir beetle, *Armillaria* root disease, and fir engraver are already present in this area.

In addition, over the past several years, higher temperatures and less precipitation have caused the trees to be stressed.

Accordingly, many of the proposed harvest areas in the Smith Lake and Beaver Lake areas (see maps on pages 2 and 3) have had between 10 and 35 percent of the trees die over the past 5 years.

Even if this current proposal were implemented, several stands would continue to be at high risk for insect infestations. However, salvage timber sales would continue to take place.



Scattered tree mortality caused by insects and diseases in Stillwater State Forest.



Douglas-fir trees that have been attacked by the Douglas-fir beetle.

Many of the proposed harvest areas have had between 10 and 35 percent tree mortality in the past 5 years.

Water Quality

Comments received on the Initial Proposal addressed water quality as an issue for the proposed timber sale because Whitefish Lake is a municipal water source for the city of Whitefish.

DNRC has monitored water quality in Swift Creek, the largest watershed tributary to Whitefish Lake, since 1976 and continues to monitor water quality. Monitoring at the Lower Swift Creek site, immediately above Whitefish Lake, is a cooperative effort between the Whitefish Lake Institute, Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Monitoring Lower Swift Creek site is a cooperative effort between the Whitefish Lake Institute, Montana DEQ, DNRC, and adjacent landowners.

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The following are other water resource considerations for this project:

- The project design minimizes activities in the Swift Creek watershed. A limited amount of harvesting, primarily to address insect issues, is planned for that area.
- All forest roads used for accessing harvest units will have additional surface-drainage and ditch-relief features installed as needed to comply with Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce the risk of sediment being delivered directly to a stream or other body of water.
- The Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) hydrologist will ensure that the design of the new stream crossings fully comply with all applicable laws to protect water quality.

Murray Lake

During the Initial Proposal comment period, many recommendations requested that West Murray Lake Road be restricted to nonmotorized use. This would help alleviate the ongoing issues of litter, bonfires, and off-road motorized use that causes extensive damage.

Additional recreational pressure would be put on the popular North Murray Lake site, which has very limited parking, if this road was closed. Therefore, the closure of this road should be tied to a larger planning effort for

recreational use in the Beaver Lake area. Thus, road restriction considerations for the West Murray Lake Road are beyond the scope of this analysis and will not be analyzed further with this project.

Last fall, a new gate was installed at the west end of Murray Lake cul-de-sac and a road closure was strengthened at the north end of the lake.

This spring efforts were made to improve the boat ramp on the north end of Murray Lake. This effort included placing large rocks for shoreline

protection, improving drainage to reduce sediment delivery into the lake, and making a designated parking area.

Ways to further address the impact issues to Murray Lake are being explored.

A newly hired Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (DFWP) game warden is funded to concentrate on state trust lands. Enforcement presence should be substantially increased to address trash and illegal motorized use, among other problems.

Forest Fuels and Fuel Management

This project is a step toward reducing forest fuels and the potential risk of a wildfire. Dead trees and ladder fuels would be reduced. Debris from logging would be ground into biomass fuel or piled and burned.

The last major projects (Beaver Lake timber sales and Beaver-to-Skyles Reciprocal Road Access Project) in the Beaver Lake and Skyles Lake areas helped firefighting tactics by improving the transportation system. This current project would reduce fuel loading and



Log forwarder taking logs to landing.



Ground and ladder fuels allows wildfires to burn hotter and spread faster.

ladder fuels in the harvesting areas, which should result in fires of lower intensity. These fires are generally safer to fight, cost less to suppress, and involve fewer acres. In addition, DNRC is an active participant in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, which is in the process of prioritizing fuel-reduction projects and applying for grants related to fuels reduction for this area near Whitefish.

You have probably seen, and will continue to see, our fire crews working on thinning and piling projects to reduce fuels around the forest this summer.



Excavator piling slash to reduce fuel loads and, potentially, reduce fire intensities.



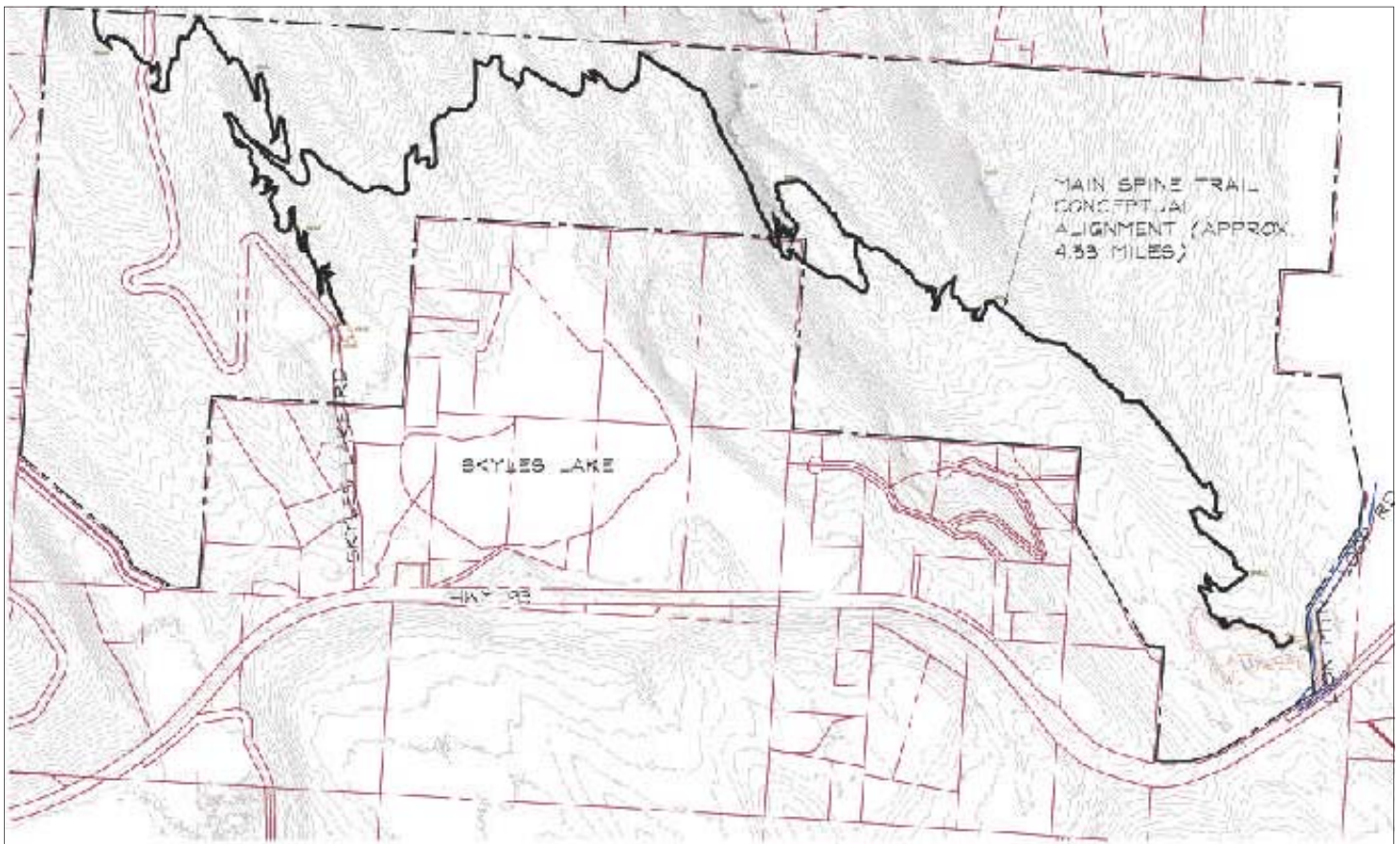
A harvest unit with reduced fuel loads.

The Trail Runs Through It Project

The City of Whitefish has a Land Use License for a portion of the community's *Trail-Runs-Through-It* project. This project, a concept brought forward through the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan, would develop a community trail system on state, federal and private cooperators' lands in the area surrounding the City of Whitefish. Preliminary trail locations on state land in the Skyles area have been located. Discussions will continue with DNRC on its exact location and the specific trail standards. Also, discussions are taking place with the City of Whitefish and the contracted trail designers on the measures to mitigate the anticipated effects of the timber

sale proposal. Following are some of the mitigations being considered in this timber sale:

- Logging would be done during the winter.
- The number of skid trails would be minimized near the Trail.
- Options would be sought to utilize portions of a temporary road as part of the Trail Runs Though It.
- Harvest plans would be designed prior to finalizing the trail design plans and addressing fuels issues on portions of the trail.



West Smith Lake Road Relocation/Disc Golf Course

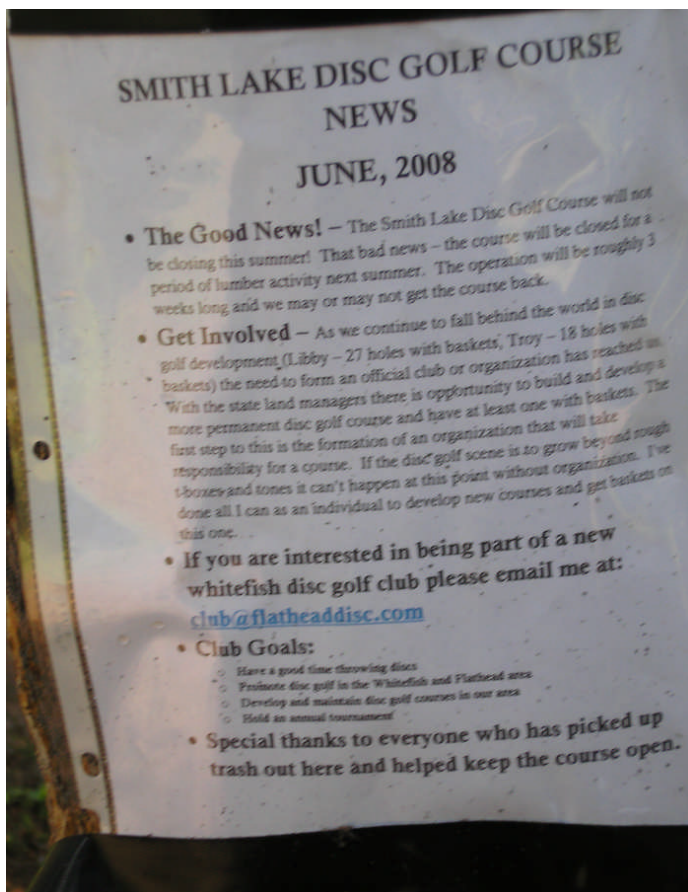
West Smith Lake Road would be improved to provide reasonable access to Smith Lake, provide better sight distances where the road intersects with DelRey County Road, and provide a larger parking area. This will enable the State to meet BMP obligations to protect water quality and meet County road specifications for access to our lands.

A new intersection would be constructed just north of the

existing junction so traffic from both directions can be seen. A parking area would be constructed where the junction is presently located.

The new segment of road and harvest activities would probably impact the use of the unauthorized disc golf course. However, DNRC's intent is to do this work in the autumn when use of the course has slowed down. Furthermore, DNRC is working with a member of the disc golf

community, Ken Deeds, to communicate our efforts to the users of this course. If you would like to pass information to him, you may contact Ken at kendeeds@montanasky.net. Hopefully, a legitimate disc golf course could be created in the Smith Lake or Beaver Lake area so impacts to the forest are minimized and the school trusts receives compensation for the recreational use.



Notice to disc golf course users from Whitefish Disc Golf Club attached to post.



Resulting trails and compaction of extended use of disc golf course area.

What is Next?

The ID Team is made up of several foresters, a hydrologist, and a wildlife biologist. This team will continue with various analyses and help complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) this fall.

As noted earlier, the unit managers from both the Stillwater Unit and Kalispell

Unit will decide on the course of action. If the decision is made to proceed with the action alternative, several timber sales will likely be developed and taken to the Land Board for sale approval this fall and winter.

Please call the Stillwater State Forest at 406-881-2371, send

a postcard to Stillwater State Forest, P.O. Box 164, Olney, MT 59927, or e-mail email mmcmahon@mt.gov if you would like to be notified when the EA has been completed and posted online.

FURTHER INFORMATION

On-the-ground tours of the proposed harvest areas can be scheduled through September. Project leaders are also willing to meet with groups and organizations to further explain the project. For more information, please contact Michael McMahon, Stillwater State Forest at 406-881-2670.

State of Montana

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